



Welcome to Park County

Park County spans nearly 85 miles from north to south and encompasses over 1.7 million acres of land. Public lands comprise nearly 57% of the county’s scenic landscape, home to the highest peak in Montana – Granite Peak. Just over 16,000 residents live here and enjoy the beautiful expanse of scenic mountains and river valleys the landscape offers. Agriculture, healthcare and social services, and tourism are major economic drivers.

Park County has over 550 farms that encompass nearly 775,000 acres where primarily cattle, hay, and cereal grains are produced. Livingston HealthCare is Park County’s largest employer and, driven by our proximity to Yellowstone National Park, beautiful rivers and mountains, and vibrant small towns, tourism employs thousands of people.

Park County Extension is funded jointly by the City of Livingston, Park County, and Montana State University and maximizes taxpayer investment by leveraging funds and resources to improve lives, landscapes, and livelihoods. For every \$53 dollars invested by Park County taxpayers, MSU invests \$47 – an 89% return on investment.

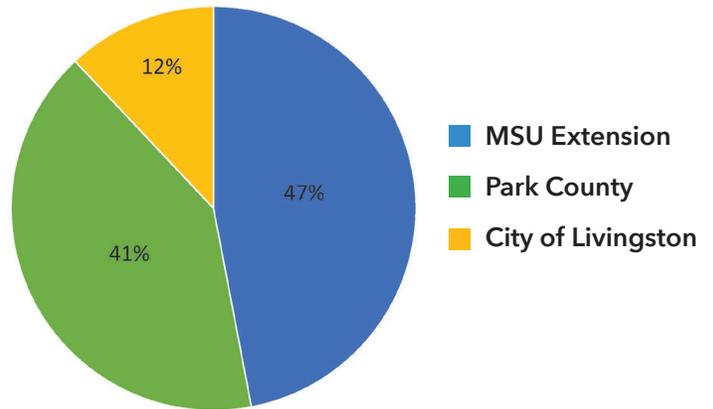


Photo by Tracy Mosley

Collaborative weed management efforts improving Park County landscapes

Park County MSU Extension's agriculture agent has partnered with the Park County Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) group for nearly a decade to fight weeds. The partnership has been effective since 2008, when the group formed. Since 2013, Park County MSU Extension has secured eight grants totaling \$203,723 on behalf of the CWMA to support education and management of noxious weeds.

In 2017, the partnership's foci were finishing three cost-share grants for weed management, hosting three workshops for small landowners, cooperating with homeowners associations on educational events for landowners, and distributing biological control agents. Through the three cost-share grants, 29 landowners received cost-share assistance to purchase herbicide or hire a commercial pesticide applicator. In total, 7,426 acres of Priority 2B (abundant and widespread) noxious weeds were sprayed across Park County in 2017.

The partnership hosted three workshops for 90 landowners owning 200 acres or less who were

interested in weed management. Workshops focused on ecologic and economic impacts of weeds, legal requirements of landowners to control noxious weeds, weed identification and management strategies, grazing practices to limit weed invasion, and writing an integrated weed management plan. Post-workshop evaluations indicated participants increased their knowledge about the legal designation of noxious weeds (98%), ecologic and economic impacts of weeds (100%), legal obligations of landowners to mitigate weeds (95%), grazing management to limit weed invasion (100%), weed identification (94%) and effective control strategies (97%), and how the Park County CWMA can assist with weed management (100%). Many respondents indicated they intend to write an integrated weed management plan because of the workshop (87%). Overall, 75% of respondents rated the workshop Excellent and 23% rated it Good.

Three Park County homeowners associations hosted events for the partnership to provide education on weed identification and management, where 31 property owners



Helicopters approach to refill spray tanks for aerial weed control. Photo by Tracy Mosley

from three HOAs attended. Participants increased their knowledge and confidence related to weed management. As a result of the knowledge gained, eight participants purchased herbicides and implemented control practices for spotted knapweed, St. Johnswort, Canada thistle, and Houndstongue on their property.

The partnership works with landowners to distribute reduced-cost biological control agents for weed control. In 2017, 26 landowners released spotted knapweed root-boring weevils on 65 sites, yellow toadflax stem-boring weevils on three sites, and St. Johnswort foliage-feeding beetles on five sites.

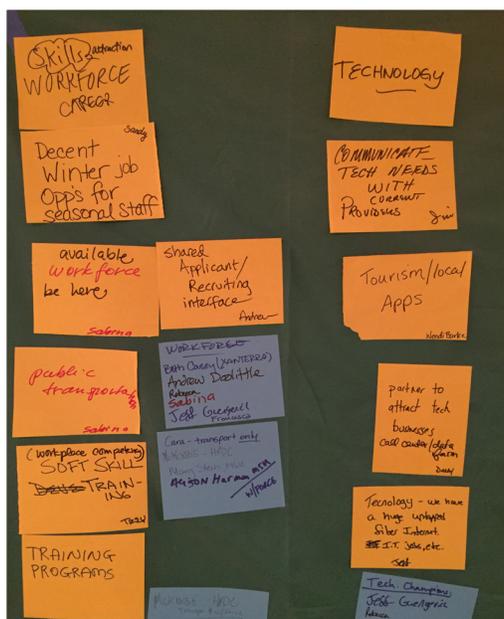
Collaboration between the partnership and landowners continues to improve plant diversity, increase forage for wildlife and livestock, and reduce sedimentation into waterways across Park County.

Gardiner Tourism Partnership launches to address challenges and strengthen businesses

In March 2017, Park County MSU Extension’s community development agent helped business leaders in the Gardiner area launch the Gardiner Tourism Partnership. Designed to strengthen regional economies and address workforce challenges, the Next Gen Sector Partnership model is a fresh approach to economic development that is driven by industry and supported by the public and nonprofit sectors.

Twenty-one business leaders attended the launch and eight public and nonprofit partners were represented. Initially, six priorities were identified, including culture, housing, technology, workforce, season expansion, and sustainability. Work continued through the spring to refine each priority area and to develop and begin implementation of action plans.

Over the summer, the partnership began monthly socials; hosted by a different business each month, these business-to-business events focus on sharing cultural and organizational practices and successes. A survey of existing



Gardiner Tourism Partnership in the planning stages. Photos by Josh Bilbao

business interest in season expansion was launched and discussions to get employee transportation to and from Livingston were held. Moving into 2018, the partnership has identified workforce challenges is the highest priority and is seeking to further engage with public and nonprofit partners such as MSU's new Hospitality Program and Montana Department of Labor.

While local impacts began to occur, the Gardiner Tourism Partnership has also received state and national recognition. Partnership co-chair, Jeff Guengerich, joined an industry champion panel at the Innovate Montana Symposium in July to talk about the process, initial goals, and early wins. As the convener of the partnership, Katie Weaver was invited to join the Texas Next Gen Sector Partnership Academy as faculty in November. She worked with a rural region of the state, sharing her knowledge of how the model works in very rural communities, sharing successes, and helping to troubleshoot challenges.

Community Leaders Recognized

Extension success is founded on the partnerships and collaborations built with individuals, groups, and organizations within the county. The important work we do isn't possible without passionate and dedicated volunteers, supporters, and partners. Park County MSU Extension honored eight outstanding community leaders who have been committed to positively impacting Park County.

Local MSU Extension agents recognized leaders who have selflessly given of themselves to improve Park County landscapes and the lives of youth, families, and communities. The honorees were:

- Margy Dorr, LINKS for Learning; for her passionate and dedicated leadership in impacting the lives of youth and building strong organizations that support the people of Park County.

- Bob Fleming, Park County Cooperative Weed Management Area; for his dedication to the Park County Cooperative Weed Management Area group and for his efforts to foster collaboration for noxious weed management in Park County.
- Joe Hanser, First Interstate Bank; for being a champion of leadership development and his commitment to improving the lives of youth and the communities of Park County.
- Druska Kinkie, E Bar P Ranch; for her devotion to finding solutions to combat brucellosis in Park County and southern Montana, being a strong advocate for the agriculture industry, and efforts to further leadership development across the county.
- Jeanne McCormick, Master Gardener Volunteer; for her dedication as a Park County Master Gardener instructor and her efforts to improve the quality of the course each year.
- Josh Otis, Park County 4-H Council; for his passionate dedication and long-standing commitment to creating safe and positive learning environments for the youth of Park County.
- Deb Purvis, Cooke City Water District; for her vision, tenacity, and tireless dedication to building a strong community through her work on the Cooke City Water District and Chamber board.
- Jim Sykes, Park County 4-H Council; for his selfless dedication to helping youth reach their fullest potential.

Honorees were recognized at an appreciation barbeque in September where clientele from across the county were invited. The barbeque served as an opportunity to recognize community leaders, as well as an opportunity for the wide demographic of Park County MSU Extension clientele to interact.



Community leaders were recognized at Park County MSU Extension's Community Leader Appreciation Barbeque. Photo by Melissa Tecca

After receiving an award, one recipient stated, “I would like to thank those of you who were involved with me receiving this award. We all have been at this long enough to know that one person can’t do it without the strong support of those they work with.”

Unique partnership helps students explore careers in high school

A new position at Park High School (PHS) is changing students’ expectations from ‘just another year of school’ to ‘a free opportunity to explore careers.’ Meagan Lannan, the Work-Based Learning Facilitator (WBLF), helps students identify their passions and skills, encourages them to research careers in those areas, and then places them at work sites in the community to develop hands-on experience. A partnership between the Montana Department of Labor, Park High School, the Livingston School District, the Arthur Blank Foundation, and Montana State University Extension made this possible.

Since 2012, PHS has surveyed senior-year students to determine their post high school plans. On average, 30% of each class indicated they were entering the workforce. When asked where and with who, they replied “I don’t know.” The WBLF’s job is to change this. Success has already started. Below, one student who struggled academically but flourished in an autobody shop shared his gratitude:

“Hey, I feel like I haven’t really directly thanked you for setting me up at O’Connors. It’s honestly difficult for me to express in words how much it means to me. But, basically you put me in the position to achieve my dream for life. And I cannot thank you enough for that. If you ever need anything at all I would be more than happy to help.

Just kind of an update for you—Frank has offered me a job working for him at O’Connors. He has also offered to pay for “Icar” schooling, which is equivalent to me going to almost any tech school and paying a lot of money for. On

another note, just out of curiosity, do you happen to remember what school you found that was comparable to Wyotech? While Frank can teach me and get me certificates for auto body and such, he can't get me very far with automotive mechanics. Again thank you so, so much for all your help, it truly means a lot to me.”

Park County MSU Extension Agents Katie Weaver and Mary Anne Keyes, and Montana Department of Labor Special Projects Manager Meagan Lannan were driving forces behind this project. Weaver's expertise in sector partnerships led to conversations with PHS in 2014 and increased focus on career planning and exploration. In 2016, Keyes and Lannan were awarded a \$20,000 grant/year for four years from the Arthur Blank Foundation to fund this position, further leveraging \$482,000 through partnerships within the community and state.

When \$196 Million Rests on Food Safety Practices

Situated along Interstate 90 and home to the northeastern and northern Yellowstone National Park entrances, Park County experiences over a million visitors every year. Providing safe, high-quality, reliable accommodations, restaurants, and other services is critical to maintaining a strong tourism industry. The Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) at the University of Montana estimates that in 2015 spending by non-resident travelers in Park County was \$196 million. The ITRR report continues “on a per capita basis, no major tourism county in Montana has more in non-resident spending than Park, supporting an estimated 2,700 jobs.”

Park County MSU Extension recognized the importance of food safety because according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, foodborne illnesses affect nearly 48 million people each year. Of those, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die. The state of Montana also recognized the importance of food safety and in 2015 adopted new administrative rules. They require retail food establishments employ one person who is a Certified Food Protection Manager (CFPM). To become certified, an individual must complete an eight-hour training and pass an 80-question exam.

Since 2015, Park County MSU Extension and the Park County Environment Health Department partnered to create a culture of food safety within the county by training food service employees, managers, and owners locally and affordably.

One hundred fifty-two people took the course and 122 earned CFPM certifications. Eighty-five establishments participated, including businesses located outside the county. The course focuses



Park County Director of Public Health and Nursing Services visits with a student during a career exploration event. Photo by Mary Anne Keyes

on practicing good personal hygiene, controlling time and temperatures, preventing cross contamination, proper cleaning and sanitizing, and microbiology. One participant noted, “I have attended a ton of food safety trainings. This was far and away the best. It was fun, and I felt prepared to take the test. I also passed!” Another participant said,

“I learn best in a classroom environment. I could have taken the online course, but I don’t think I could have passed that test. I struggle to learn by myself.”

In addition to the CFPM training, the partners offer four-hour employee food handler courses. Since 2015, 91 adults, 100 high school students and 30 middle school students successfully completed the four-hour training and received a ServSafe Employee Food Handler Training Certificate. A four-hour class participant reported, “I interviewed at a convenience store. When the owner found out I had a certificate, she raised my starting wage by \$2 an hour.”



ServSafe class participant puts the finishing touches on his Norovirus poster. Photo by Mary Anne Keyes

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